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INFO RUEHBJ/AMEMBASSY BEIJING 3446
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RUEHKA/AMEMBASSY DHAKA 6798
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 NEW DELHI 005621

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E.O. 12958: DECL: 08/11/2016

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PINR](#) [PREL](#) [KDEM](#) [EPET](#) [IN](#)

SUBJECT: TWO GRUMPY OLD MEN HIJACK NATIONAL POLITICS AND
STOKE ANTI-AMERICANISM

REF: A. NEW DELHI 5494

[1](#)B. NEW DELHI 5285

[1](#)C. NEW DELHI 5138

Classified By: Charge Geoff Pyatt for reasons 1.4 (B,D)

[1](#)1. (C) Summary: Two grumpy old men, Natwar Singh of Congress and Jaswant Singh of the BJP, have made unwise decisions that will likely end their political careers. Too proud to admit to poor judgment, both men have blamed Congress for their problems and taken the offensive. Ordinarily, their fate would be little more than a political footnote, but in the current supercharged political atmosphere it could have longer-term implications. The Left, increasingly frustrated with the pro-US tilt of the Prime Minister, has joined hands with powerful regional parties to oppose the India/US Nuclear Accord. An embittered Natwar and Jaswant have thrown their weight into this effort. Although the two Singhs are unlikely to survive in the political arena, their agitation has helped a nascent anti-US alliance gain ground. The Communists are backing the ruling Samajwadi Party (SP) in the February 2007 Uttar Pradesh (UP) elections, while Congress has vowed to knock the SP from power. If the Left and SP do well in this contest, it could heighten calls for the Communists to withdraw support from the UPA, and bring on a mid-term poll with the intent of increasing the power of this "third front." If that happens, these stubborn septuagenarians may well have lit the fire by their current disgraceful antics. End Summary.

Jaswant Puts His Foot in His Mouth

[1](#)2. (C) On the face of it, the actions of Jaswant Singh, the BJP's leader in the Upper House of Parliament, seem ludicrous, but they could have far-reaching political

ramifications. At the same time as his book launch, Singh tabled a 1995 "letter" in Parliament, which he claimed was from former Ambassador Harry Barnes to Senator Thomas Graham.

Singh further asserted that the letter proved the existence of a US spy in the office of then Prime Minister PV Narasimha Rao. The "mole" allegations have blown up in his face, making him and the BJP objects of ridicule throughout the country. This was epitomized by the August 1 Parliamentary debate, during which Singh rambled on incoherently for two hours, while UPA MPs repeatedly shouted "mole, mole." PM Manmohan Singh interjected several times demanding that Singh present the name of the "mole" or withdraw his allegations. Congress, sensing a target of opportunity, on August 2 tabled a motion in Parliament alleging that the letter was faked, that Singh's insistence on its authenticity constituted a serious error of judgment, and demanding that he step down as his party's leader in the Upper House.

While Natwar Sinks

13. (U) Congress did not have long, however, to relish the BJP's discomfiture. On August 4 the Pathak committee of inquiry submitted its report to Parliament on the allegations made in the Volker Report regarding former Foreign Minister Natwar Singh's role in the oil for food scandal. The Pathak Report determined that while Natwar did not personally benefit from alleged oil deals involving the Saddam Hussein regime, he had "misused his position" to procure lucrative contracts and commissions for his son, Jagat Singh, and Andleeb Sehgal, a distant friend and relative. The BJP,

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reeling under the Congress attack against Jaswant Singh, immediately geared up to use Natwar's disgrace to undermine the ruling party.

Offense is Not the Best Defense

14. (U) Natwar's response to the Patwar report provided crucial assistance to the opposition. Claiming that the report "vindicated" him, Natwar became the first MP ever to bring a motion against his own Prime Minister. Natwar called on Parliament to condemn PM Manmohan Singh for allegedly leaking the Pathak report to the press before it could be presented to Parliament. The BJP quickly lined up to support Natwar's motion (which was denied). Natwar's move outraged Congress President Sonia Gandhi and other Congress leaders, who promptly suspended Natwar from the party and asked him to "show cause" why he should not be expelled.

A Growing anti-US Alliance

15. (C) Both Natwar and Jaswant Singh epitomize high-caste pride and unwillingness to admit to error. This has led them to compound their problems by blaming the Congress, the UPA and PM Manmohan Singh for their falls from grace and joining with UPA opponents to work against the government. Both men have allied themselves with an anti-US group in Parliament which the press has called the "nuclear club" because of its hostility to the US/India Civil Nuclear Accord. Other members include former BJP Foreign Minister Yashwant Singh, CPI-M politburo member Sitaram Yechury, SP General Secretary Amar Singh, and Janata Dal-U leader Digvijay Singh.

16. (C) The "Nuclear Club" has fabricated a loose alliance that has worked jointly against the India/US Accord and backed Natwar Singh's motion against the PM. The Left Front(LF), ironically at the heart of this group even as it supports the UPA coalition, has crafted a close alliance with the SP, while attracting the regional parties AIADMK (Tamil Nadu), Telegu Desam (Karnataka) and Janata Dal-U (Bihar).

Possible Political Ramifications

¶7. (C) Few expect that Jaswant and Natwar will be able to salvage their shattered political reputations. Most observers expect Natwar to be expelled from Congress eventually, while Jaswant is likely to lose his position as leader of the opposition in the Rajya Sabha and see his political fortunes fade away. This has not prevented opportunistic political parties from taking advantage of their misfortune, however. The emerging unity between the LF and powerful regional parties has prompted growing speculation that the Communists may be building up their strength in preparation to bring down the government. The Communists and Congress have been sparring since their marriage of convenience in 2004. Since then, Communist strength has continued to grow, while that of Congress and the BJP declines. The Left has used the Nuclear Accord issue to embarrass Manmohan Singh and has even worked at times with the hated BJP to score points against the UPA. The downfall of the two Singhs has provided them with more grist for their mill.

Long-term and Short-term

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¶8. (C) The Communists' principal reason to stick with their enemies in Congress has been to prevent a resurgence of the even more hated enemies in the BJP. The Jaswant episode has revealed just how weak, dis-spirited and disunited the BJP has become, with powerful regional allies leaving the NDA to throw their support to the Left. Growing Left anger over the PM's stance on the Nuclear Accord and his recent reluctance to condemn strongly Israeli actions in Lebanon have also contributed to the rumors of an impending Congress/Left break. In the past, Communist leaders were quick to assert their loyalty to the UPA following every disagreement. This time the mood is different and no such assertions have been forthcoming. While the UPA is unlikely to fall over the short-term, everyone will be watching the expected February 2007 election in Uttar Pradesh (UP). There, the Communists are supporting the SP, while Congress has vowed to knock the SP from power. This election will give the nascent Left/regional alliance a chance to demonstrate its appeal at the polls. If, sometime next year, the Left and Regional Parties decide to unseat the UPA, it may well be said that Jaswant and Natwar provided the spark that started it all.

¶9. (U) Visit New Delhi's Classified Website:
(<http://www.state.gov/p/sa/newdelhi/>)
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